

For many Christians, the fear of death has not been alleviated by their faith but sometimes, even enhanced. I find that many Christians have a stronger fear of death than their unbelieving friends or family. The reason for this is, I believe, is varied. Many non-believers avoid thinking about death in a way that is not possible for Christians, whose faith is centered around the historical death and resurrection of Jesus. Also, while I believe it is much more difficult to disbelieve in God than many atheists would like to pretend, it is undoubtedly true that most non-believers give very little thought or consideration to God, while Christians think about Him a great deal. Thinking about God would have the necessary effect of thinking of His judgment, and that provokes great fear in many Christians who may also have a greater sensitivity to the knowledge of their sins as well. To address the fear of death, the devotions for this week may be helpful.

Day 1

Faith in Christ's Righteousness and Propitiation

One aspect of the fear of death in Christians is very interesting to me. I believe that most Christians are more sensitive to the judgment of sins and reality of hell than most non-Christians. I believe that this results often in a greater fear of death in Christians than in the general population, but there is something quite strange about this. The same belief in the God of the bible and his judgment of sin should yield a corresponding belief in the salvation offered by Christ. The stronger the belief in God, the stronger the belief in hell but also of the access of heaven by the blood of Jesus. While this seems logical, I find that it often is not the case. How do we reconcile that a person can strongly have confidence that God judges sin and sends sinners to hell, while having a weaker confidence in the salvation offered by Jesus? I believe that the answer is found in the difficulty in accepting grace. The pull of the belief that I must merit salvation through my own righteousness is so strong, the idea of salvation from grace fails to persuade. Even though the same bible tells us of the judgment of God in sending sinners to hell and the salvation of grace through faith, we find one fact easier to have confidence in than the other. Has God told you that Jesus was his only begotten son, God incarnate, and that He lived a perfectly righteous life that is credited to your account, dying on the cross to propitiate the Father's wrath and providing eternal life through faith? Why would you have less confidence in this truth than in the reality of hell and the judgment of sinners? Meditate on the truth of Christ's righteousness and the salvation that is found in his substitutionary atonement and the propitiation of wrath that leads to salvation today, and as often as is necessary for your confidence to grow.

Verses: 1 John 2:2, 1 John 4:10, Romans 3:25

Prayer Topics: Restoration, Salvation, Forgiveness

Day 2

Meditate on the Blessings of Death

This seems a strange thing to meditate on, but if you have confidence in the salvation that Jesus has earned for us, then there are many benefits to death that should enter our thoughts often enough that we have no fear of death. While most of us live joyful lives, the truth is that there are abundant opportunities for suffering in this world. When I was a kid, my parents would listen to a song that spoke of making a list of "won't be" in heaven. All the things on this earth that cause us pain, turmoil, anxiety, and fear won't exist after death. We will be united with God in Jesus Christ, established in a truly familial community with all other people, and joyful to the maximum degree possible. We will be reunited to lost loved ones, reconciled to those we are estranged from, and even closer than ever to our dearest friends and family. We will be free from our pride, our laziness, our anger, our hatred, and our lust. We

will have been saved from substance abuse, vanity, corrupt thinking, and fear. We will have new purpose, new bodies, new strength, new love, and consummated hope. We will have no sorrow, and no end. There are so many benefits to death for the believer, but we are called to serve on earth here and now. That service will be made much lighter, much more joyful, and much more fruitful if we meditate on the blessings of our salvation in eternity.

Verses: John 14:2, Revelation 21:4, 1 Corinthians 2:9

Prayer Topics: Peace, Joy, Love, Freedom

Day 3

Trust in His Time

When I was young, a day seemed to last for a week. I remember that I could spend what felt like days playing with my friends before lunch, and dinner time seemed an eternity away. Summer was several lifetimes, and forget about Christmas because it would never come. There was a carefree joy in life as a child, and much of it centered around the perception of time. As kids, we never thought of death or growing old, and there was always enough time. I never worried about the clock, and if I was interested in it at all it wasn't so I could meet a deadline but so that the school day would finally be over because if there was any problem with time it was that there was too much of it. As an adult, things are much different. There is never enough time. The clock hangs over everything like an executioner. Will there be enough time? Where has the time gone? Why does it move so fast? I may be wrong, but I think that much of our concern with time as we get older is our impending death. We believe that we will not have enough time to do all the things we must do to be judged positively. We feel like we can never do enough, that the standards are so high we can never meet them in the time we have. We worry that we will not have done enough before our deaths to secure blessings for our families. We wish we had more time to right our wrongs and make up for our mistakes and fix our flaws. We have plans we believe we must get to, and hopes and dreams we are afraid will elude us due to lack of time. Why is it so difficult to trust that God will give us enough time? Why is it so hard to believe that eternity awaits, and we really do have, in a sense, all the time in the world? Why can we not understand we have exactly the right amount of time? Enough time to use, but too little to waste? The amount of time necessary to give the moment meaning, but never so little that we must feel oppressed by its passage. Trust in the time God gives.

Verses: Ecclesiastes 3:1-8, Psalm 90:12, 2 Peter 3:8

Prayer Topics: Moment, Timeline, Eternity

Day 4

Cultivate Your Relationship with Christ

Going to the doctor is stressful for most people. The doctor judges you, and tells you if you will live or die. Most of us have been to the doctor enough that the stress is manageable, but not pleasant. Going to the courthouse is worse, if for the simple fact that you go before a judge you do not know, since most of us do not go to the courthouse enough to be familiar with the judges. When my sons were young, they were the victims of a frivolous lawsuit that consumed years of our time. In the end, the lawsuit went to trial, and while I didn't have to testify, I felt nervous for my sons who did. Our family's lawyer was great, practicing what the testimony and the court would be like to get my sons familiar with what would take place when the appointed time for their testimony would arrive. They would have been much more at ease, obviously, if the judge would have been a close friend instead of a perfect stranger.

If we want to be free from the fear of death, it is necessary to make friends with the judge, and He would like nothing better than to be the closest friend you ever had. He waits, at any time of the day or night, for you to talk to him and grow in your trust of him. Start taking the time to get to know him through reading his words, praying, and meditating on who He is, and be free from the fear of death. They say that everyone dies alone, but in reality, death is the path to true and eternal unity. Start that eternal relationship today.

Verses: Galatians 1:10, Romans 12:1-2, Job 22:23-26

Prayer Topics: Proximity, Familial Bond, Trinity

Day 5

Celebrate Today

There are many things to be grateful for as Christians, and perhaps one of the most transformational things is to practice the gratitude of eternity. Be grateful that eternity awaits you, and start seeing your life with the perspective of eternity. Today is not the first day of the rest of your life, but the first day of eternity. Forever is literally in front of you. What will you do? Who will you become? What stress does that relieve? What possibilities does that open? Instead of seeing a finite future in front of you, see the eternal over the horizon. It is an eternity with no more suffering, no more sin, and no more loneliness. All that starts today. Which part will you work on? What will you enjoy? Who will you bring along? Eternity awaits, so get started!

Verses: John 5:24, Ecclesiastes 3:11, John 17:3

Prayer Topics: Everlasting, Infiniteness, Imperishability